



# City of Seattle

Department of Planning & Development

D. M. Sugimura, Director



## INITIAL RECOMMENDATION OF THE NORTHEAST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Project Number: 3012615

Address: 4029 7th Avenue Northeast

Applicant: Nicholson Kovalchick Architects

Date of Meeting: Monday, May 07, 2012

Board Members Present: Salone Habibuddin  
Joe Hurley  
Peter Krech  
Christina Pizana

Board Members Absent: Martine Zettle

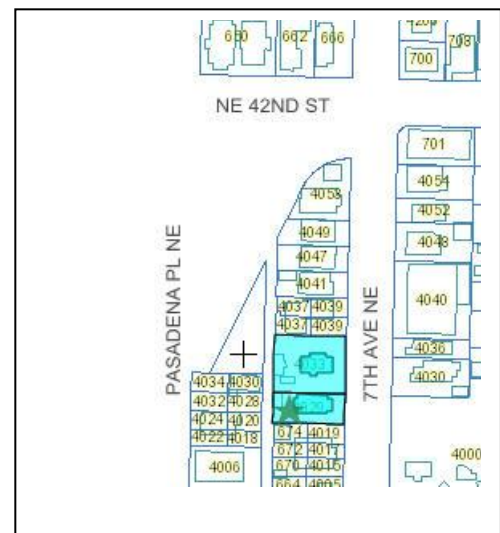
DPD Staff Present: Bruce P. Rips

### SITE & VICINITY

Site Zone: Lowrise Three (LR3)

Nearby Zones: North: LR 3 to NE 45th St.  
South: South of Burke Gilman trail,  
zoning changes to Major Institutional  
Overlay with an Industrial Commercial  
(IC) underlying zone.  
East: Zoning changes to Commercial  
One with a 65 height limit east of 9th  
Ave. NE  
West: At I-5, the zone changes to Single  
Family (SF 5000)

Lot Area: 10,695 square feet.



Current Development: A duplex and a triplex sit on the two properties.

Access: Vehicular access occurs on the alley to the west of the site.

Surrounding Development & Neighborhood Character: The University District is a diverse neighborhood with a wide array of building types. The immediate vicinity of the proposal includes single family houses, townhouses and mid-size residential buildings. To the west of the project site across the alley, lie newly constructed three-story townhouses. Similar development occurs on adjacent properties to the north and south. On the east side of 7th Ave NE, a four-story apartment building, University P-Patch and a King County Metro facility occupy several parcels. The western edge of the University of Washington sits three blocks to the east. Major arterials include NE 45th St. to the north, I-5 a block to the west, and NE 40th to the south. 7th Ave. NE is classified as a minor arterial.

ECAs: No Environmentally Critical Areas on the properties.

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The applicant proposes to build a five-story structure housing approximately 78 dwelling units and no parking.

## **DESIGN DEVELOPMENT**

The three schemes vary in their approach to massing, yet, share several qualities. Vertical and horizontal circulation is placed on the exterior creating upper level walkways and staircases open to the sky. For the most part, each of the schemes sits close to the Seventh Ave. NE right-of-way and at a distance from the alley or rear property line. Scheme One forms two, parallel five-story structures connected by open walkways along the north/south axis. The vertical circulation systems (i.e. stairs, elevator) occupy the space between the two volumes. The design provides a shared, landscaped open space at-grade along the alley behind the structure. This scheme would not provide parking. Scheme Two resembles a “J” shape in plan. The bulk of the mass lies parallel to 7<sup>th</sup> Ave. rising above the neighboring townhouses. The open space formed by the perpendicular masses occupies the site’s northwest corner. A staircase and elevator sit between the open space and the northern most units. Nine parking spaces line the alley.

The “C” shaped massing for Scheme Three places the parking between the alley and the building mass. The three wings of the building embrace a void that forms an outdoor amenity area with its open end facing the parking lot. Exterior stairs and walkways encircle two sides of the open space along with an elevator.

The scheme brought forward at the Recommendation meeting, a loosely “J” shaped scheme in plan, places a five-story wing of studio units facing 7<sup>th</sup> Ave. NE. Another mass fills in the southwest corner of the site with a double loaded corridor of the same unit type. At the ground plane, an open air entrance on 7<sup>th</sup> Ave. NE leads to a leasing office and storage areas. Occupying the site’s northwest corner, an open space for the residents looks onto the alley. Another amenity area sits on the roof’s southwest corner. Two open staircases and an elevator connect the floors and lead to the open corridors. The northern most stairs rises above the lower patio.

The structure’s salient features, the saw-toothed roof and grey metal siding layered behind and above orange fiber cement panels, somewhat suggest industrial vernacular buildings. The primary residential entrance has a custom made gate inspired by bicycle forms.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Approximately ten members of the public affixed their name to the Recommendation meeting sign-in sheet. The raised the following comments:

### **Privacy**

- Consider the privacy of the residents of the townhouses to the north. Reduce the window size and adjust the height so that the tenants of the apartment building are looking into the townhouses.
- Baffle the exterior stairs to eliminate noise.

### **Height, Bulk and Scale**

- The new project will block light into the townhouses to the north. The saw-toothed roof is unnecessary.
- The structure is too large and not accurately represented on the drawings presented to the Board.
- The proposed building is out of character with the neighborhood and much taller than any other building.
- The departure for the setback on the alley should not be approved.
- Approval of the departure request for the portion of the building near the south property line will cause the structure to cast shadows onto the townhouses to the north.
- The renderings are an affront. They misrepresent the adjacent buildings.
- The townhouses in this part of the University District were built in an area where they don’t belong.

### **Miscellaneous**

- Secure the perimeter to ensure security between buildings.
- The developer made no attempt to contact the adjacent property owners.
- It is quite doubtful that the project will truly provide affordable rents.
- There appear to be major problems with fire access.
- The applicant has done a good job of addressing the issues.

## PRIORITIES & BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS

After visiting the site, considering the analysis of the site and context provided by the proponents, and hearing public comment, the Design Review Board members provided the following siting and design guidance. The Board identified the Citywide Design Guidelines & Neighborhood specific guidelines (as applicable) of highest priority for this project.

The Neighborhood specific guidelines are summarized below. For the full text please visit the [Design Review website](#).

### A. Site Planning

#### A-3 **Entrances Visible from the Street.** Entries should be clearly identifiable and visible from the street.

##### **University-specific supplemental guidance:**

**Context:** Another way to emphasize human activity and pedestrian orientation, particularly along Mixed Use Corridors, is to provide clearly identifiable storefront entries. In residential projects, walkways and entries promote visual access and security.

##### **Guidelines:**

1. On Mixed Use Corridors, primary business and residential entrances should be oriented to the commercial street.
2. In residential projects, except townhouses, it is generally preferable to have one walkway from the street that can serve several building entrances.
3. When a courtyard is proposed for a residential project, the courtyard should have at least one entry from the street.
4. In residential projects, front yard fences over four (4) feet in height that reduce visual access and security should be avoided.

The wider front entrance with its custom-made gate (bicycle theme) met with the Board's approval.

#### A-5 **Respect for Adjacent Sites.** Buildings should respect adjacent properties by being located on their sites to minimize disruption of the privacy and outdoor activities of residents in adjacent buildings.

##### **University-specific supplemental guidance:**

**Context:** This Citywide Design Guideline is particularly important where a building's back side, service areas or parking lots could impact adjacent residential uses. Map 2 (page 8) shows potential impact areas—these are where Lowrise zones abut commercial zones.

**Guideline: Special attention should be paid to projects in the zone edge areas as depicted in Map 2 to ensure impacts to Lowrise zones are minimized as described in A-5 of the Citywide Design Guidelines.**

The Board recommended that the applicant increase the amount of privacy for the townhouse and the units on the north side of the proposed structure. Several techniques could be used: staggering the windows on the north elevation to avoid a direct relationship to the townhouse windows; raising the windows' sill heights to 5'6"; and eliminating the windows.

Due to the proximity of the northern most exterior staircase to the neighboring property, the architect should design and install sound baffling devices to ensure a quiet environment for the neighbors. The resolution of the stair's acoustics will be subject to the planner's review and approval.

**A-6 Transition Between Residence and Street. For residential projects, the space between the building and the sidewalk should provide security and privacy for residents and encourage social interaction among residents and neighbors.**

**A-7 Residential Open Space. Residential projects should be sited to maximize opportunities for creating usable, attractive, well-integrated open space.**

**University-specific supplemental guidance:**

**Context:** There is a severe lack of both public and private open space in the community. Small open spaces—such as gardens, courtyards, or plazas—that are visible or accessible to the public are an important part of the neighborhood's vision. Therefore, providing ground-level open space is an important public objective and will improve the quality of the residential environment.

**Guidelines:**

- 1. The ground-level open space should be designed as a plaza, courtyard, play area, mini-park, pedestrian open space, garden, or similar occupiable site feature. The quantity of open space is less important than the provision of functional and visual ground-level open space.**
- 2. A central courtyard in cottage or townhouse developments may provide better open space than space for each unit. In these cases, yard setbacks may be reduced if a sensitive transition to neighbors is maintained.**

**A-8 Parking and Vehicle Access. Siting should minimize the impact of automobile parking and driveways on the pedestrian environment, adjacent properties, and pedestrian safety.**

**University-specific supplemental guidance:**

Context: In Lowrise residential developments, single-lane driveways (approximately 12 feet in width) are preferred over wide or multiple driveways where feasible.

## **B. Height, Bulk and Scale**

- B-1 Height, Bulk, and Scale Compatibility.** Projects should be compatible with the scale of development anticipated by the applicable Land Use Policies for the surrounding area and should be sited and designed to provide a sensitive transition to near-by, less intensive zones. Projects on zone edges should be developed in a manner that creates a step in perceived height, bulk, and scale between anticipated development potential of the adjacent zones.

**University-specific supplemental guidance:**

Context: The residential areas are experiencing a change from houses to block-like apartments. Also, the proximity of lower intensive zones to higher intensive zones requires special attention to potential impacts of increased height, bulk and scale. These potential impact areas are shown in Map 4 . The design and siting of buildings is critical to maintaining stability and Lowrise character.

Guideline: Special attention should be paid to projects in the following areas to minimize impacts of increased height, bulk and scale as stated in the Citywide Design Guideline.

The Board did not act to change the proposal's size.

## **C. Architectural Elements and Materials**

- C-1 Architectural Context.** New buildings proposed for existing neighborhoods with a well-defined and desirable character should be compatible with or complement the architectural character and siting pattern of neighboring buildings.

**University-specific supplemental guidance:**

Context: Buildings in the University Community feature a broad range of building types with an equally broad range of architectural character. Because of the area's variety, no single architectural style or character emerges as a dominant direction for new construction. As an example, the University of Washington campus sets a general direction in architectural style and preference for masonry and cast stone materials, however, new buildings on and off campus incorporate the general massing and materials of this character, rather than replicating it.

**Guidelines:**

1. Although no single architectural style or character emerges as a dominant direction for new construction in the University Community, project applicants should show how

the proposed design incorporates elements of the local architectural character especially when there are buildings of local historical significance or landmark status in the vicinity.

2. For areas within Ravenna Urban Village, particularly along 25th Avenue NE, the style of architecture is not as important so long as it emphasizes pedestrian orientation and avoids large-scale, standardized and auto-oriented characteristics.
3. On Mixed Use Corridors, consider breaking up the façade into modules of not more than 50 feet (measured horizontally parallel to the street) on University Way and 100 feet on other corridors, corresponding to traditional platting and building construction.
4. When the defined character of a block, including adjacent or facing blocks, is comprised of historic buildings, or groups of buildings of local historic importance and character, as well as street trees or other significant vegetation (as identified in the 1975 Inventory and subsequent updating), the architectural treatment of new development should respond to this local historical character.
5. Buildings in Lowrise zones should provide a “fine-grained” architectural character.

**C-3 Human Scale.** The design of new buildings should incorporate architectural features, elements, and details to achieve a good human scale.

See Board’s D-3 recommendations.

**C-4 Exterior Finish Materials.** Building exteriors should be constructed of durable and maintainable materials that are attractive even when viewed up close. Materials that have texture, pattern, or lend themselves to a high quality of detailing are encouraged.

University-specific supplemental guidance:

Guidelines:

1. New buildings should emphasize durable, attractive, and well-detailed finish materials, including: Brick; Concrete; Cast stone, natural stone, tile; Stucco and stucco-like panels; Art tile; Wood.
2. Sculptural cast stone and decorative tile are particularly appropriate because they relate to campus architecture and Art Deco buildings. Wood and cast stone are appropriate for moldings and trim.
3. The materials listed below are discouraged and should only be used if they complement the building’s architectural character and are architecturally treated for a specific reason that supports the building and streetscape character: Masonry units; Metal siding; Wood siding and shingles; Vinyl siding; Sprayed-on finish; Mirrored glass.
4. Where anodized metal is used for window and door trim, then care should be given to the proportion and breakup of glazing to reinforce the building concept and proportions.
5. Fencing adjacent to the sidewalk should be sited and designed in an attractive and pedestrian oriented manner.
6. Awnings made of translucent material may be backlit, but should not overpower neighboring light schemes. Lights, which direct light downward, mounted from the

awning frame are acceptable. Lights that shine from the exterior down on the awning are acceptable.

7. Light standards should be compatible with other site design and building elements.

### Signs

**Context:** The Citywide Design Guidelines do not provide guidance for new signs. New guidelines encourage signs that reinforce the character of the building and the neighborhood.

#### **Guidelines:**

1. The following sign types are encouraged, particularly along Mixed Use Corridors – Pedestrian oriented shingle or blade signs extending from the building front just above pedestrians; Marquee signs and signs on pedestrian canopies; Neon signs; Carefully executed window signs; such as etched glass or hand painted signs; Small signs on awnings or canopies.
2. Post mounted signs are discouraged.
3. The location and installation of signage should be integrated with the building's architecture.
4. Monument signs should be integrated into the development, such as on a screen wall.

Noting the reduction in the amount of metal siding, the Board approved the general selection and placement of materials. The architect, however, should reconsider the spandrel's design as it appears large for a single panel of fiber cement.

## **D. Pedestrian Environment**

- D-3 Retaining Walls.** Retaining walls near a public sidewalk that extend higher than eye level should be avoided where possible. Where higher retaining walls are unavoidable, they should be designed to reduce their impact on pedestrian comfort and to increase the visual interest along the streetscapes.

The Board noted its discomfort with the height of the retaining wall shown on p. 20 of the Recommendation packet. In order to reduce the impact of a high wall on 7<sup>th</sup> Ave NE, the upper portion of the retaining wall facing 7<sup>th</sup> Ave NE should have a declension resembling the image on p. 26.

- D-6 Screening of Dumpsters, Utilities, and Service Areas.** Building sites should locate service elements like trash dumpsters, loading docks and mechanical equipment away from the street front where possible. When elements such as dumpsters, utility meters, mechanical units and service areas cannot be located away from the street front, they should be situated and screened from view and should not be located in the pedestrian right-of-way.

- D-7 Personal Safety and Security.** Project design should consider opportunities for enhancing personal safety and security in the environment under review.



The applicant will need to develop the edges of the site to ensure a secure environment.

**D-8 Treatment of Alleys. The design of alley entrances should enhance the pedestrian street front.**

<b>E. Landscaping</b>
-----------------------

**E-2 Landscaping to Enhance the Building and/or Site. Landscaping, including living plant material, special pavements, trellises, screen walls, planters, site furniture, and similar features should be appropriately incorporated into the design to enhance the project.**

The Board noted its satisfaction with the landscape design.

**Recommendations:** The recommendations summarized below were based on the plans and models submitted at the May 7, 2012 meeting. Design, siting or architectural details not specifically identified or altered in these recommendations are expected to remain as presented in the plans and other drawings available at the May 7, 2012 public meeting. After considering the site and context, hearing public comment, reconsidering the previously identified design priorities, and reviewing the plans and renderings, the Design Review Board members recommended APPROVAL of the subject design and the requested development standard departures from the requirements of the Land Use Code (listed below). The Board recommends the following CONDITIONS for the project. (Authority referred in the letter and number in parenthesis):

- 1) Increase the amount of privacy for the townhouse and the units on the north side of the proposed structure by using one or more of several techniques: stagger the windows on the north elevation to avoid a direct relationship to the townhouse windows; raise the windows' sill heights to 5'6" or eliminate the windows. (A-5)
- 2) Design and install sound baffling devices for the north exterior stairs to ensure a quiet environment for the neighbors. The resolution of the stairs is subject to the planner's review and approval. (A-5)
- 3) In order to reduce the impact of a high retaining wall on the 7<sup>th</sup> Ave NE pedestrian environment, the upper portion of the retaining wall facing 7<sup>th</sup> Ave NE should have a declension resembling the image on p. 26 of the Recommendation meeting booklet. (D-3)
- 4) Develop the edges of the site to ensure a secure environment. (D-7)

**DEVELOPMENT STANDARD DEPARTURES**

The Board's recommendation on the requested departure(s) are based upon the departure's potential to help the project better meet these design guideline priorities and achieve a better overall design than could be achieved without the departure(s).

STANDARD	REQUIREMENT	REQUEST	JUSTIFICATION	RECOMMEND- ATION
1. Maximum Façade Length within 15' of a lot line. SMC 23.45.527B	65% maximum combined façade length. 59'9"	76'8". Approximately 17' (a 28% increase) greater than code allowance at south property line.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Widening the façade allows for residential units to be rotated away from I-5.</li> </ul>	Recommended approval
2. Rear Setback. SMC 23.45.518	Minimum at alley equals 10'.	10' to building façade; 9' setback to open stairs. An increase of 1' at stairs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides a more commodious staircase.</li> </ul>	Recommended approval

Ripsb/doc/design review/REC.3012615.docx